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## **Salvage Team Removes Fuel From Grounded USS Guardian**

**From U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs**

SULU SEA – To prevent potential environmental damage, a U.S. Navy-led salvage team on Jan. 25 completed removing all diesel fuel from the tanks of the mine countermeasures ship USS Guardian (MCM 5), which ran aground on the Tubbataha Reef one week earlier.

No fuel has leaked since the grounding and approximately 15,000 gallons was safely transferred to the contracted Malaysian tug Vos Apollo during controlled defueling operations that occurred over the last two days.

“One of our priorities was to get the fuel out of the ship in order to minimize environmental damage,” said Rear Adm. Tom Carney, the on-scene commander of the salvage operation.

Carney spoke about the salvage operations during a joint press conference with Philippine Coast Guard Rear Adm. Rodolfo Isorena in Puerto Princesa, Palawan on Jan. 24. The U.S. Navy is working in close cooperation with the Philippine Coast Guard and Navy, and assessment teams continue to inspect the condition of the vessel and the reef in order to develop a plan to safely remove the ship.

“The problem is very complex, and both Naval architects and salvage engineers are working together to develop plans,” Carney said. “The nature of the shipboard damage makes it a difficult operation, and the dynamic nature of the environment increases those challenges.”

Two heavy lift ship-borne cranes have already been contracted to support the salvage operations and are due to arrive at the scene around Feb. 1.

“The option that we had hoped to tow the ship off the reef is not available,” said Carney. “The ship is too badly damaged.”

With a primary mission to detect and counter mines, Guardian has a wooden hull covered in fiberglass similar to surfboards. The hull has been punctured and several areas of the ship have been flooded. The repeated pounding of heavy seas on the ship, which hampered recovery efforts in the days immediately following the grounding, has also resulted in the loss of much of the fiberglass coating on the port side.

Carney stated his top priorities are to ensure no one is injured during salvage operations while carefully protecting the important natural environment of Tubbataha Reef.

“I have been to the Philippines many times before and truly understand the reef is a national treasure and very important to the Philippine people,” Carney said.

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